

The use and abuse of dental charity

REVIEWS.

Editorial, New York Medical Record, June, 1891.

THE USE AND ABUSE OF DENTAL CHARITY.



A very interesting paper with the above title was presented by Dr. Richard Grady, of Baltimore, to the Section of Oral and Dental Surgery at the meeting of the American Medical Association in Washington in May. It seems that our dental friends have not been as wide awake to their own interests as they should have been, and now they find that, like their medical brethren, they have allowed their colleges to establish dispensaries, one after the other, "for the relief of the indigent poor and the instruction of students," until the time has now come when they realize that these same dispensaries are treating the well-to-do as well as the really deserving, and taking the bread out of the mouths of their own graduates for whose interests, as students, it was claimed that the infirmaries were established.

It is only recently that this abuse has attained such proportions as to alarm the members of the dental profession, and this protest of Dr. Grady is, we believe, the first that has been made publicly against the constantly growing evil. The Maryland Dental Protective Association was organized in Baltimore, in February, a year ago, its object being to regulate the administration of dental charity, but thus far nothing has resulted from the movement except the adoption of a resolution calling upon the dental colleges to insist upon the giving of aid to the really indigent only, which resolution, as far as heard from, has not yet effected the desired reform.

The author of the paper had informed himself very carefully as to the conditions of infirmary treatment in the different dental colleges of the country, and had found that abuses existed in nearly all, though in varying degree, some discriminating against patients who appeared to be in comfortable circumstances, others taking everybody that came along in their scramble for clinical material. One college had adopted a truly unique method "to discourage well-to-do people by making charges a little higher than those ordinarily made in offices." Inquiries had also been made among dentists in the larger cities as to the effect upon practice of the competition with the colleges, and the answers to these inquiries were, as was to be ex-

pected, that the injury done to the younger men in the profession was a very real one. The colleges advertised for patients, setting forth in glowing terms the excellence of the workmanship and the extreme reasonableness of the charges, and thereby at once gained an advantage over the individual dentist, who was debarred by professional opinion and the fear of forfeiting the respect of his associates from advertising in a similar fashion.

But it is not so much the facts presented by Dr. Grady, as it is the manner in which his hearers received his paper, to which we wish to direct the attention of our readers. The paper was discussed after it had been read, and again the following day, its discussion having been made the regular order for that session. The result of this was the unanimous adoption of a resolution that "the Section would suggest to the National Association of Dental Faculties the importance of some action toward correcting any existing abuses of the charities connected with dental colleges or schools." We are glad that the dental surgeons have taken this matter up with the intention of doing their best to right the beginning wrong, and we wish them the greatest measure of success in their crusade. And we wish this not alone for their sake, but also because, if they succeed, it may give heart to those of the medical profession who are trying to secure for their younger brethren the means of a decent livelihood by freeing them from the unjust and ruinous competition of the dispensaries and clinics which take so many patients that should belong to the private practitioner.

Leading Article, London Lancet, July, 1891.

We may be permitted one word of caution in regard to the extension of what is called the charity of dentistry. It may well be that the poor have need of much of the dental relief for which the rich are ready to pay such high prices. But there is need of caution. Some of the dental journals publish with a note of satisfaction the increasing numbers who get relief gratuitously at dental hospitals. THE NEW YORK MEDICAL RECORD, of June 27th, devotes an article to the use and abuse of dental charity. The abuse in the States is beginning to alarm the members of the dental profession. One very questionable remedy is being applied in one of the dental hospitals —viz., to make charges a little higher than those ordinarily made in hospitals. It is enough now to indicate the evil to put our readers and the authorities of dental hospitals on their guard. The phenomenon of the "wholesale barbarous extractions of peripatetic quacks" is a very strange one. Perhaps the

strangest part of it is the willingness of the victims to submit to this mutilation simply because they can have it done for nothing.

The Dental Cosmos, August, 1891.

American Medical Association—Section of Oral and Dental Surgery—Dr. Richard Grady read a paper on Dental Infirmary Patients—The Use and Abuse of Dental Charity.

The paper was discussed at some length by Drs. Taft, McNaughton, Williams, Andrews and Talbot.

All agreed that there was great injustice to the profession in the gratuitous or professedly gratuitous services by the dental infirmaries to people who could and should pay for the service they needed : also that the advertisements of prices to induce patients to attend the clinics were as unprofessional as would be the same advertisements if used to attract patients to a private practice.

On motion of Dr. J. L. Williams, the following resolution was adopted : Resolved, that this section would suggest to the National Association of Dental Faculties, the importance of correcting any existing abuses of the charities of the infirmaries connected with the colleges and schools.

From Editorial, International Dental Journal, October, 1891.

CRITICISM OF DENTAL COLLEGES.—Criticism, being disarmed on the old lines, has begun an open attack on the internal management of these schools, and a sample of this was given our readers in the September number of the Journal, entitled "The Use and Abuse of Dental Charity," by Richard Grady, M. D., D. D. S.

The criticism of the writer in general has force, for there can be no question but that abuses have arisen in many colleges, perhaps to a limited extent in all, and need careful attention.

The charge that colleges are making money is dwelt upon at some length, as though this was something no college had a right to do. Yet it has never been shown, or acknowledged by the colleges that they were charitable organizations in any sense of the word.

The essayist seems to recognize only one side of the question, its effect being to "lower the dignity or emoluments of private practice," "warring upon the livelihood of their professional brethren," and consequently, it is an injury to the profession in all cities afflicted with colleges. It lowers the standard of remuneration. It invites persons who can pay to have their work done at rates below a living basis.

It lowers the profession in public estimation and debases all concerned. This in substance constitutes the arraignment.

In conclusion, we must regard Dr. Grady's paper as valuable in that it will stir thought in this direction.

CLIPPINGS.

THE college clinics are prosperous, the hospitals are full, clinical material is abundant, and the young practitioner waits in vain for patients.

LONDON has only 90,000 paupers, according to its census, yet it treats in free hospitals 1,000,000 of patients annually, at a cost of \$2,500,000. Its annual hospital deficit is \$250,000.

CHARITY Organization has done good work in the cause of medical charity, by demonstrating that in the dispensaries examined one-third of the patients can afford to pay, and one-third give a wrong address and are more or less frauds.

A few days since a woman dressed in rags applied at the Boston City Hospital for surgical treatment for a scalp wound. The customary search of her person revealed several bank-books, representing \$7,100 in Boston banks, \$1,000 in bonds, and about \$300 in cash—all hidden about her clothing.

A resolution was passed "that the attention of the governing bodies of hospitals, and other public authorities, be called to the necessity for some check on the indiscriminate provision of medical treatment at hospitals and dispensaries."

TAXPAYERS are much interested in the dispensary and hospital abuse. * * * Educating a class of people to become paupers, who will not work if they can get what they need without. * * *